DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 334 028 PS 019 845

AUTHOR Coleman, James S.
TITLE Parental Involvement in Education. Policy Perspectives Series.
INSTITUTION Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC. Programs for the Improvement of Practice.
REPORT NO PIP-91-983
PUB DATE Jun 91
NOTE 32p.
AVAILABLE FROM Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402 (Stock No. 065-000-00459-3, $1.50).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Child Rearing; Community Characteristics; Elementary Secondary Education; Employed Women; Family Environment; *Family Role; *Family School Relationship; *Parent Participation; Parent Rights; *Parents; Rural to Urban Migration; School Community Relationship; *School Policy; *School Role; Social Change
IDENTIFIERS In Loco Parentis; Parent Community Relationship; *Social Capital

ABSTRACT

This policy paper addresses policymakers' concerns about parents' dwindling role in their children's lives and the resulting burden that has been placed on schools. A historical perspective of the roles of families and schools is provided. First, the man's employment in a job outside the home as households left the farm, and then the mother's entry into the labor force, have expanded the task of the school beyond that of bringing about growth in cognitive skills to that of complementing the family in child rearing. The concept of social capital, which consists of the social relations that exist in the family or community, is discussed. A new role for schools is suggested. This role involves rebuilding the social capital in the community. With the decline of parental authority and community consensus, the school's capacity to exercise the authority necessary to accomplish its task has been reduced. Rebuilding parental consensus through recreating social capital addresses this problem. Suggestions for rebuilding social capital in the community and the family are given. Parents' assertion of their rights to be involved in the education of their children is encouraged. A list of resources for schools and parents, and a bibliography of 20 items, are included. (BC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED334028

PS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

POLICY PERSPECTIVES

Parental Involvement in Education

PS 019845

Office of Educational Research and Improvement
U.S. Department of Education

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

POLICY PERSPECTIVES

Parental Involvement in Education

James S. Coleman

3

U.S. Department of Education
Lamar Alexander
Secretary

Office of Educational Research and Improvement
Bruno V. Manno
Acting Assistant Secretary

Programs for the Improvement of Practice
Nelson Smith
Director

June 1991

Policy Perspectives Series

Workplace Competencies: The Need to Improve Literacy and Employment Readiness

Excellence in Early Childhood Education: Defining Characteristics and Next-Decade Strategies

Increasing Achievement of At-Risk Students at Each Grade Level

Accountability: Implications for State and Local Policymakers

Parental Involvement in Education

Project coordinator: Kathleen C. Price
Editor: Gerard Devlin

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, D.C. 20402

Foreword

Across this Nation, we must cultivate communities where children can learn . . . . Where the school is a living center of a community where people care—people care for each other and their futures. Not just in the school but in the neighborhood. Not just in the classroom, but in the home.

—President George Bush, April 18, 1991,
in a White House address announcing
AMERICA 2000: A National Education Strategy

In the 1950s and 1960s, many television shows portrayed the "typical American family" as one where father worked and "knew best," mother stayed at home, and the concerns and problems of the children often dominated the household. Even children whose families were fragmented or dysfunctional seemed to pose comparatively few problems for either schools or society, since they were often able to find the support and attention they needed in the nearby homes of friends and neighbors.

In the space of a scant quarter century, this picture has changed. Today, single-parent families abound, mothers working outside the home are the norm rather than the exception, and parents everywhere confront perplexing choices about how to use their time and energy. When decisions are made, the concerns and problems of children are sometimes overshadowed by the demands of the workplace. And parents who are hard pressed to meet the emotional and intellectual needs of each other as well as their own youngsters often provide little support to other neighborhood children who may need adult help or guidance. Thus, it is not surprising that the condition of the American family generally—and the sharp decline in parent involvement in particular—are topics of concern today.

Our already overburdened schools, meanwhile, are being asked to shoulder an even greater share of parental and community responsibilities, and the demands are coming at a time when schools are straining to perform even their traditional responsibilities with regard to learning. Today, for example, school readiness and safe, drug-free schools are among the national goals we are struggling to achieve, rather than the realities we once took for granted.

The magnitude of our national concern was highlighted this spring when President Bush launched what he promised would be a 9-year "populist crusade" to transform American education "school by school, neighborhood by neighborhood, community by community," in an all out bid to move the Nation toward achieving the six national education goals by the year 2000. At the heart of the President's plan is **AMERICA 2000**, a four-pronged education strategy that challenges all segments of the Nation to make today's schools better and more accountable; to invent a new generation of American schools; to move us from being a "Nation at Risk" to a "Nation of Students"; and to make all our communities "places where learning will happen."

Pointing out that children spend 91 percent of their lives from birth through age 18 in places other than school, **AMERICA 2000** throws into sharp relief the paramount importance of home and community in promoting learning and shaping children's values. And it takes a bold step toward challenging all Americans to become engaged in the nurturing of children and to retreat from the widespread complacency that's embedded in the mistaken belief that "the Nation is at risk, but I'm OK." We are not OK. Even those parents who try the hardest often need support and direction when it comes to doing what's best for their children.

As Education Secretary Lamar Alexander recently cautioned, the revitalization of American education will not occur unless and until we each recognize that schools cannot do the job alone and that communities have a key role to play both in promoting learning and in providing support for parents. He explained:

"This means total community support for education, for schools, for students. This means adoption of the six goals by individual communities. This means involvement of local leaders in our schools .... And this means a renaissance of American values, attitudes, and personal responsibility for ourselves, our families, and our neighbors."

For those policymakers and educators who are anxious to devise strategies that will draw parents back into their children's lives as effective allies in the school's primary mission of instruction, *Parental Involvement in Education* could not have appeared at a more opportune moment. Written by the distinguished sociologist James S. Coleman of The University of Chicago, this policy paper was commissioned in direct response to policymakers' concerns about parents' dwindling role in the lives of their children and the resulting burden that has been placed on schools that were constructed originally to educate children in partnership with their families.

Dr. Coleman begins his insightful analysis with a reminder of how children learned and families functioned in the early years of our Nation. He then traces the transformations that have occurred in our homes, schools, and society up through the present day. Throughout the piece, he stresses parents' essential role in inculcating values and promoting learning, and he highlights the inestimable—but frequently underestimated—role communities play as resources for children needing or seeking help or guidance. Dr. Coleman also warns that schools—long conditioned to keeping activist parents at arm's length—must now devise strategies to reinvolve parents with their own children and with one another.

Parental Involvement in Education is the latest volume in the Office of Educational Research and Improvement's "Policy Perspectives" series. This series was developed to provide policymakers at all levels of government with new insights and fresh ideas that we hope will inform decisionmaking and contribute to the revitalization of our schools and communities. We are deeply indebted to Dr. Coleman for giving of his time and energies to provide this provocative paper. I believe that it will contribute significantly to the educational renaissance to which we have committed ourselves as a Nation.

BRUNO V. MANNO
Acting Assistant Secretary
Office of Educational Research
and Improvement

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to those members of the policymaking community who agreed to review and comment on an early draft of this document. They are: Edward Anthony, U.S. Department of Education; Nancy Berla, National Committee for Citizens in Education; Ann Kahn, National Congress of Parents and Teachers (past president); Marsha Levine, American Federation of Teachers; and Oliver Moles, U.S. Department of Education.

Contents

Foreword iii

Acknowledgments vii

Introduction 1

The New Organization of Society 1

The Second Transformation of the Household 4

Social Capital in Family and Community 7

Change of Times and Differences Among Communities 11

The Lessons Learned Too Well 12

A New Role for the School: Rebuilding Social Capital 13

Authority and Responsibility: The Demise of In Loco Parentis 14

How Can Social Capital in the Community Be Built? 16

How Can Social Capital in the Family Be Built? 18

Strategies for Parents 18

Resources for Schools and Resources for Parents 21

Bibliography 23

Introduction

A child comes to school at age 6, anxiously released by reluctant parents. Or a child comes to kindergarten at age 5, presented to the school by proud parents. Or a child comes to the day care center, left by parents on their way to work. The struggle of a couple to live and make a living, to have children and bring them up, is a struggle that increasingly involves the school, the nursery school, and the day care center. And it involves them for a larger and larger portion of each day. The demands for earlier hours for depositing children, and for longer hours of day care, nursery school, or school do not decline. Rather, a major issue confronting many schools is how to satisfy parents' demands for an extended school day.

How did all this come about? How did we get from a society which could hardly pry children from the family's grasp to a society in which parents search desperately to find day care for their youngest children?

Clearly, parental involvement in the daily activities of child rearing has declined greatly over this century. One might shrug it off as merely one example of the general increase in the division of labor in society. Yet research shows conclusively that parents' involvement in their children's education confers great benefits, both intellectual and emotional, on their children. Thus, a major issue facing American education today is this: How to improve educational outcomes for children in the face of contractions in family functioning, when strong families are so important for children's learning?

The New Organization of Society

A historical perspective may enable one to understand the situation in which children currently find themselves. Over a long period of time—almost two centuries—society has come to be transformed from a set of communities where families were the central building blocks to a social system in which the central organizations are business firms, and families are at the periphery.

In the 18th century, nearly all production was carried out within the household. Both men's and women's productive activities

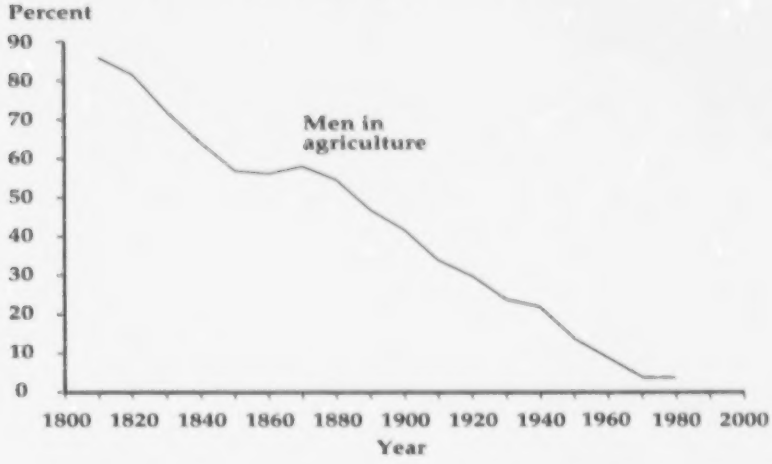
occurred there, and children were involved in these activities as well. This meant, first, that children's opportunities were constrained by the family's tight grip; second, that children were sometimes exploited by parents in furthering the economic goals of the family; but third, that constrained though it was, children's environment provided a setting for learning the productive activity they would carry out as adults. This was most often farming; but whether the household was composed of farmers, craftsmen, or merchants, it provided a setting in which children gained the skills they would need as adults.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, this pattern of child rearing and training, stable for centuries, began to alter as the household itself underwent a major change: Household production was replaced by the man's employment in a job outside the home, usually in factory or office. Most often, this meant leaving the farm. The extent of this change is shown in figure 1, which charts the declining proportion of the male labor force engaged in agriculture. In 1810, that was 87 percent; today it is about 3 percent. This means that over this period, nearly all households changed from environments where child rearing was intimately intertwined with the acquisition of productive adult skills, to environments in which only child rearing took place.

Not surprisingly, it was during this period that elementary and secondary schooling came into being to replace what had once gone on in the household itself. Figure 2 shows this phenomenon by illustrating the proportion of boys between the ages of 5 and 19 who were not in school, superimposed on the proportion of the male labor force in agriculture. The close correspondence of the two lines suggests the role that schools were playing: assuming those aspects of raising children that could not be carried out in the household as productive activities moved outside it.

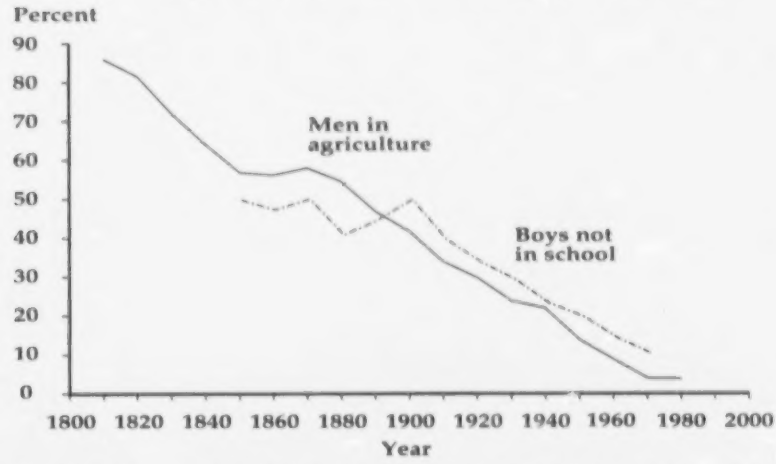
The school is a "constructed" institution, designed for a specific set of purposes, to perform functions that are no longer carried out in other contexts. This does not imply, of course, that the things learned in school do, or should, duplicate those learned in the households of the past, since the skills necessary to adult productivity at the end of the 20th century are different than they were at the beginning of the 19th. However, it is important to recognize what was lost when the child was no longer part of the productive activity in the household. Not only was occupational training lost (which formal schooling might replace with the skills of literacy and mathematics, knowledge of history and science, and specific voca-

Figure 1.—Percentage of male labor force working in agriculture: 1810–1980



SOURCE: Data are from U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970*, table 182-282, 1975; and *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1986*.

Figure 2.—Percentage of male labor force working in agriculture, 1810–1980, and percentage of boys aged 5–19 not attending school, 1850–1970



SOURCE: Data are from U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970*, table 182-282 and table H433-441, 1975; and *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 1986.

tional training), but also the learning of work habits—responsibility for completing a task, punctuality, pride of craft, and all the other characteristics that are necessary accompaniments or precursors to productive activity. In short, the family, absent the productive activity that had earlier been part of the household, came to be less well equipped to transmit these personal characteristics.

With their loss of productive functions, families did not, however, become incapable of transmitting these characteristics. Rather, the everyday activities of the household no longer required these traits on the part of children growing up within it. To instill these traits or personal habits called for conscious design and intentional intervention on the part of parents. Thus, the household shifted from a locus where the productive activities themselves induced personal habits of industry, responsibility, and pride of performance to one in which these habits were learned only if the parents acted to inculcate them. More was required of parents if they were to be effective in bringing up their children—despite the fact that schools took over the task of teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic.[1]

Schools, of course, inculcate some of these personal characteristics as part of their everyday activities. However, as constucted institutions, schools are not explicitly designed to develop these characteristics, and thus have never been very successful in doing so when the family has not. An institution designed for this purpose would be organized differently than the typical school; it would be much less engaged in individual tasks, much more engaged in jointly productive activities.[2]

The Second Transformation of the Household

There has come to be, in the 20th century, a second change in the household with important implications for the school. This is a change that parallels the man's removing his productive activity from the household.

---

[1] The research finding that in some underdeveloped areas of Africa, children of lower status families do no worse academically in school than do children of higher status families may be a result of the fact that in those societies the development of personal work habits in children arises from the household activity itself, and is not dependent, as in developed societies, on parental design.

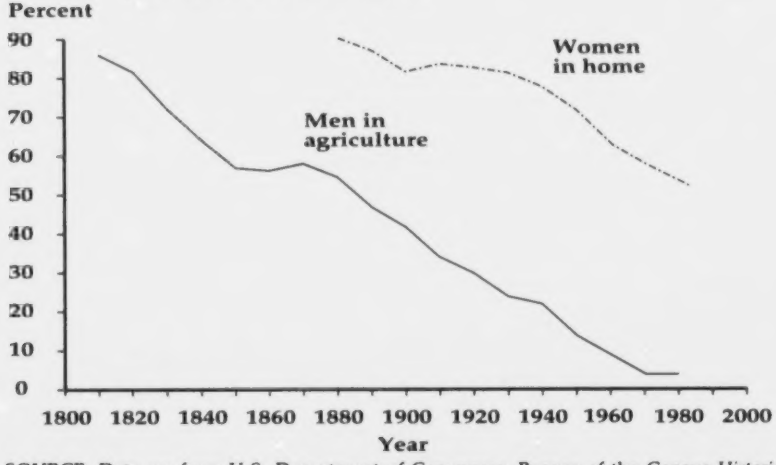
[2] Some approaches to learning do involve such joint activities, in particular the methods of cooperative learning recently introduced in a number of schools.

It consists of the woman leaving the household to enter the paid labor market. Figure 3, showing the declining proportion of women who are in the home and not in the paid labor force demonstrates this shift. The household's loss of the woman's presence parallels the loss of the man's presence about a century ago.

Figure 3 thus illustrates a problem for this constructed institution called the school. Just as the man's absence from the household during the day took away from child rearing certain functions that were then intended to be supplied by the school, the woman's absence from the household during the day has removed from child rearing certain additional functions. As women joined the paid labor force, the household lost certain functions that had been important for the school's ability to accomplish its task.

One change, apart from the need for preschool child care, is that it is more difficult for parents, when both work, to instill in their children those personal characteristics which lead to good school performance. Research results concerning effects on children's school performance of mothers working outside the home are consistent

Figure 3.—Percentage of male labor force working in agriculture, 1810–1980 and percentage of women not employed in paid labor force, 1880–1982



SOURCE: Data are from U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970*, table 182–282 and table D49–62, 1975; and *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1984*.

with this: The research shows negative effects of mothers' employment outside the home; but the negative effects are not found for children from disadvantaged families (Milne, et al., 1986).[3]

The position in which many schools find themselves today vis-a-vis the family has changed. Rather than prying the child away from the family's strong hold, they are now confronting an array of families whose involvement with their children's learning is exceedingly diverse. Some are deeply involved and have the skills to be effective. Others are involved, but in ways that are ineffective or harmful. And still others take little time to inculcate in their children those personal traits that facilitate the school's goals.

The mother's move outside the household, following the father's, has expanded the task of the school beyond that of bringing about growth in cognitive skills, such as language and mathematics. The expanded task includes the development, either alone or jointly with the family, of those personal characteristics in children that bring achievement: good work habits, self-discipline and self-responsibility, and motivation to achieve. In addition, the mother's move outside the household has produced additional demands upon the school:

- Child care from an increasingly early age;
- Earlier hours for school opening in the morning;
- Lengthening the effective school day, till parents arrive home; and
- A school-equivalent (summer school or camp) to care for children throughout the summer.

The general principle to which all these demands point is that the school is a constructed organization designed to complement the family in child rearing. When the family was still an institution that could provide for most of its children's needs (for example, every-

[3] There are various conjectures about the reason for the apparent absence of negative effects of mothers' outside employment for disadvantaged children. One is simply self-selection: In poor, often single-parent families, it is the more vigorous, active, and skilled women who have jobs. Another is that the very fact of working outside the home is invigorating and opens a window on the world for women whose lives (and whose children's lives) would otherwise be more passive and more restricted. These differences, according to this explanation, compensate for the loss of the mother's time with the child. In still a third conjecture, the frequent accessibility to grandmother for child care compensates for the mother's absence in these households, while in other non-disadvantaged working-mother households, child care is more often institutional.

thing except learning to read and write, and learning numbers), the school's task was a simple one. As the family has weakened in its capacity to raise its young, the constructed organization that is the school must change its character as well. Part of this change consists, not in substituting for the family, but in facilitating those actions of the family that can aid most the joint task of family and school in bringing children into adulthood.

If this change is to occur, however, the school must recognize its role as an institution designed to complement the family. This implies a continuous task of reconstruction, as the family itself undergoes reorganization.

The remainder of this paper will lay out some general points concerning changes in family and community that have an impact on the school, and then indicate some components of the reconstructive task that schools confront in the face of these changes.

Social Capital in Family and Community

One concept that will be useful in characterizing the situation confronted by the school, and thus by children, is the idea of *capital* in its various forms. Traditional discussions of capital have focused on its tangible forms, whether financial capital or productive equipment. Building on this concept, economists have developed over the past 30 years the idea of human capital, that is, the assets embodied in the knowledge and skill that a person has. As economists have used the term, it has meant principally an individual's level of educational attainment. The more education, the more human capital. Like financial capital or physical equipment, human capital is a productive asset, useful in producing desired outcomes.

In recent years, sociologists and a few economists have recognized that the social relations that exist in the family or in the community outside the family also constitute a form of capital. (See Loury, 1977; Bourdieu, 1980; Flap and DeGraaf, 1986; and Coleman, 1990, chapter 12.) While physical or financial capital exists wholly in tangible resources, and human capital is a property of individual persons, social capital exists in the relations between persons.

Social capital can be of several sorts, serving different purposes. If a child trusts an adult, whether a parent or a member of the community, and the adult is trustworthy, this relation is a resource on

which the child can draw when in difficulties, whether with schoolwork, with friends, with a teacher, or with other problems. If the relations in a community are strong enough to establish norms about the behavior of children and youth and to impose effective sanctions toward their observance, this constitutes a resource for children, protecting them from the predations of peers, and a resource for parents to aid in shaping the habits of their children. These are two forms of social capital; more generally, social capital held by a person lies in the strength of social relations that make available to the person the resources of others.

All forms of capital—financial, human, and social—are important for children's education. There have, however, been changes over time in the quantity of each of these forms of capital: In general, financial and physical capital have grown, as has human capital, but social capital has declined. The growth in human capital is easily seen by the increase in educational attainment in the population. The decline in social capital in the family is suggested (though not directly measured) by figure 3, showing the effective evacuation of the household by its adult members.

Other measures reinforce this assessment: In the 19th century and early 20th century, some families were three-generation households, containing not only children and parents, but also grandparents. Three-generation households gave way to the nuclear family consisting of parents and children, a subset of these persons, and thus a subset of the social relations that had existed in the three-generation household. This meant as well a loss of adult time for children in the household, for there were fewer adults. Now, however, two-parent families are giving way in part to single-parent families, as divorce and illegitimate births increase.

Social capital in the family that is available to aid children's learning is not merely the presence of adults in the household, but the attention and involvement of adults in children's learning. Adults' presence in the household is a necessary condition for this, but not a sufficient one. The amount of social capital provided by adults in the household may vary widely without variation in their physical presence.

An example from the Yonkers, New York, school system several years ago will illustrate the point: In the Yonkers district, textbooks were bought by parents for children's use. But officials discovered that some Asian immigrant families were buying two sets of text-

books, not one. When they investigated, they discovered that the second set was for the mother, to help her so that she would be better able to help her children in school. In these families, parents were not merely present in the household; there was a strong involvement in their children's education, that is, social capital for the children's learning. Furthermore, the mothers in these families had little human capital in the form of education, but the strength of their interest in their children's learning was sufficient to mobilize what human capital they had in the service of their children's education.

More generally, one can conceive of four logical possibilities as illustrated in figure 4. In cell 1 is the family in which both human capital and social capital are present: well-educated parents who are involved with their children's learning. In cells 3 and 4 are families

Figure 4.—Presence or absence of human and social capital in the family

		Social Capital: Yes	Social Capital: No
Human Capital	Yes	1	2
	No	3	4

traditionally regarded as disadvantaged, without education. But cell 3 represents families like the Asian families described earlier, who, despite the meager supply of human capital, do manage to aid their children, because of the strength of the social capital. Cell 2 is the typically overlooked case, the new form of disadvantage in the family: well-educated parents, whose time and attention are directed outside the family, and who remain unavailable to aid children's learning. These typically are middle-class families, sometimes intact and sometimes single-parent households, whose members provide little in the way of social and psychological resources for one another.

Research results indicate the importance of both human capital and social capital in the household for the success of children in school.

The research results merely document what school administrators and teachers observe in everyday settings: Those children succeed best in school whose parents are intelligent and well educated (human capital) and involved and interested in their children's progress (social capital). Research results show that parents' education is an important predictor of children's educational achievement; and they show also the importance of such aspects of social capital as parents' reading to a young child, and a strong interest of both parents in the child's going on to college.[4]

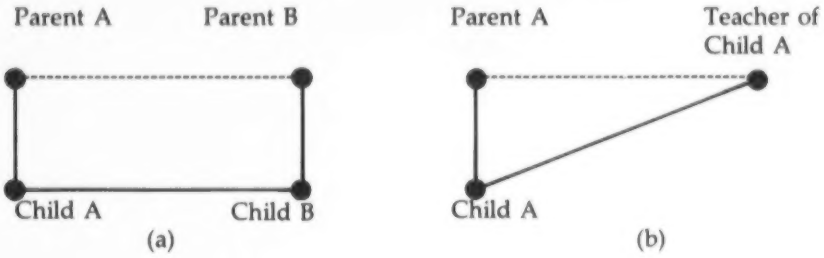
There is, however, another form of social capital that is important for a child's success in school. This is social capital in the adult community outside the household. The importance of this form of social capital is less apparent to school administrators and teachers, because the contrasts lie not between families in the same school, but between schools themselves.

A school with extensive social capital in the community of parents is one in which parents have been able among themselves (or sometimes with the help of the school) to set standards of behavior and dress for their children, to make and enforce rules that are similar from family to family, and to provide social support for their own and each others' children in times of distress. In a community with extensive social capital, research evidence shows an important fact: The social capital of the community can to a considerable extent offset its absence in particular families in the community. For example, children from single-parent families are more like their two-parent counterparts in both achievement and in continuation in school when the schools are in communities with extensive social capital (see Coleman and Hoffer 1987, chapter 5).

Social capital in the community depends greatly on the stability and strength of the community's social structure. Two forms of structure important for the growth of community social capital that can aid in children's learning and in preventing dropout are shown in figure 5. Figure 5a shows schematically the relations between parents and children in two families, and the relation between the children themselves—and what is problematic in many communities, the relation between the two sets of parents, which closes the loop.

[4] The results described in this paragraph can be found in two major national surveys of educational achievement, *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, in 1965 (see Coleman, et al., 1966, Chapter 3.2), and in the High School and Beyond survey in 1980 (see Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore 1982, tables A6 to A12).

Figure 5.—Two structures that support the growth of social capital in the community surrounding the school



When this loop is closed, when the social structure among the parents exhibits closure in this way, Parent A and Parent B can set norms and standards for their children, can compare notes about rules for their children, and are not vulnerable to their children's exploitation of ignorance about what rules exist for other children. In addition, Parent A can provide support for Child B when necessary, and can sometimes serve as a bridge if the child's communication with his or her own parent has broken down. In short, each parent constitutes a capital asset both for other parents in the community and for children in the community.

The structure of figure 5b involves again the parent-child relation, it involves the relation between child and teacher, and it involves a third relation that is problematic: the relation between parent and teacher. This relation also closes the loop, and makes possible both support for children and social control of children that would be absent if there were not the information flow between teacher and parent that comes about with closure of this set of relations.

Change of Times and Differences Among Communities

The kinds of community structures in which there is not closure of the form shown in figures 5a and 5b are relatively new in the history of schooling. Traditionally, many school administrators found themselves not with a scarcity of social capital in the community, but with

an excess. Communities were plagued with gossip, with strong cliques, with parents who, banding together, were able to defeat the aims of the school. Some schools continue to be beset by these problems. But for most schools now, the problem is the opposite one: parents whose communication with other parents is minimal, and who, as their child progresses toward high school, are unable to counter the force of the child's peers leading in directions they fear.

Through transmitted tradition or their own experience, school administrators have learned ways to cope with communities of the traditional type, whose excess of social capital could impede the school's task. The other kind of community, not with an excess but with a deficiency of social capital, is a newer phenomenon, one less often recognized, and one for which fewer strategies have been developed by school administrators. Yet the building of social capital is often feasible, and once built, it can constitute an important asset to a school.

The Lessons Learned Too Well

Parent involvement with a child's schooling can be of various kinds, some of which teachers and principals attempt to avoid. Interaction between parents and schools is often antagonistic or at least unpleasant. Parents contact the school when they feel things are going wrong in their child's schooling. Schools summon parents when the child does not meet the school's demands or expectations. Whether initiated by the parent or the school, such meetings are tension inducing, both for school staff and for parents.

Parental involvement with schools can be harmful to school functioning in another way. Parents want special treatment and special favors for their children.[5] They may use their influence directly or indirectly, individually or in cliques, to gain this special treatment at the expense of other children—and if they are successful, the school can be torn by parent-initiated strife.

[5] In some school districts, the interest in special favors goes further: Parents want jobs for themselves. In a recent meeting of Kentucky school administrators, one principal from Eastern Kentucky reported that a major problem he confronted was adult members of the community, parents and others, attempting to get jobs for themselves or their relatives. This school was in a county in which the state and the county were the principal employers, either for work on the roads or for work in the schools.

These are two of the reasons why school administrators and teachers are wary of parental involvement in the school. There are others as well. Parents and teachers disagree on aspects of the curriculum. In Scarsdale, New York, in the 1950s, a group of parents who regarded Howard Fast's books as a communist influence struggled to force the school to remove them from the library. In more recent years, school conflicts erupt periodically over textbooks used by schools and opposed by parents.

Most of these forms of parental involvement were most prominent when communities and families were strong. It is not merely because of the community's conservative views that recent school conflicts over textbooks have occurred in rural areas where communities are strong, and able to mount a collective force against the school.

On the basis of all these kinds of experiences, teachers and principals have learned to guard their autonomy and to deflect community interference. But these lessons make the school ill adapted to a setting in which the community and the family are weak. In this circumstance, there is a second lesson: that schools have always been far more effective for children whose parents were involved with their education than for children whose parents were not. The effective functioning of schools has depended on the effective functioning of family and community. What makes some ghetto schools function poorly is that the communities and families they serve are weak, lacking the social capital that would reinforce the school's goals. Similarly, a likely source of the lower school achievement in the 1980s compared to the 1950s is the loss of social capital in family and community throughout the United States over this period.[6]

A New Role for the School: Rebuilding Social Capital

When families and communities are weak, the school lacks a resource that is central to its effectiveness in educating children. Lessons learned from a past in which social capital was abundant

[6] Other sources are possible as well, the most prominent being the reduced curricular demands in high school resulting from liberalized course requirements for college entrance.

can obscure a central fact: *The effectiveness of schools in settings where the social capital of family and community is weak depends upon the rebuilding of that social capital.* This can be a task for agencies other than the school, but it is a task which is in the interest of no party more than that of the school. In such a setting, a school must in its own interests take on new activities to accomplish its task of educating children. If the school is to accomplish this task (that is, if children are to learn, and not merely be taught), then it must help rebuild the family and community social capital that facilitates learning.

This rebuilding requires something beyond parental involvement with the school. It requires school involvement with parents. Once this principle is adopted, then questions follow: How can social capital in the community be constructed? How can social capital in the family be constructed? These questions are examined in later sections of this document. First, however, a specific problem that has arisen in many schools must be addressed: the problem of establishing authority sufficient to maintain the order necessary to learning.

Authority and Responsibility: The Demise of In Loco Parentis

The building of social capital in the community has a special importance for schools confronted with problems of maintaining authority. The respect of children and youth for a school's authority is in some part derivative from their parents' respect for the school's authority. That, in turn, depends on the existence of social capital among the parents of the school.

Schools have traditionally drawn their authority over, and responsibility for, the children in their care from the authority of the parents. The principle of in loco parentis, the school standing in the place of the parent, has been the guiding principle. This has, however, never been a simple task: Parents have been reluctant to give up control of their child, even to the extent necessary for the school to carry out its task. The ideal school, from the parent's view, would be one that took extensive responsibility for the child's educational development, but never exercised authority beyond that to which the parent, were the parent consulted, would have assented. The extensive conflicts between school and parents over corporal punishment

are a reminder of this disparity between the authority parents are willing to give up and the authority schools find necessary to their task.

Yet in the more robust communities of the past, a consensus held that allowed the principle of in loco parentis to function reasonably well. Those communities differed in two ways from most current populations served by a school. First, parents themselves exercised stronger authority, for a longer time (at least through the end of high school), over their children. Second, a generally high level of community consensus existed, with the leading families of the community (whose goals and standards were generally consonant with those of the school) weighing more heavily in that consensus than did the families whose children were most often subject to the school's disciplinary measures. This sometimes led to an oppressive authority system in the school, but it was authority which was generally accepted by the adult community.

Both of these conditions have changed, reducing the school's capacity to exercise the authority necessary to accomplish its task. The reduced scope and duration of parental authority over children mean that the grant of authority to schools from some parents has shrunk, reducing the scope of rules the school can enforce. The reduced consensus, brought about by the absence of social capital in the community, frees deviant parents to contest the school's authority without inhibition. The school's principal may as a consequence spend time defending the school in court cases, or in extended disputes outside the court. Some principals regard the modern school in the modern setting as ungovernable. The principle of in loco parentis appears to be in permanent eclipse; some new principle appears to be necessary if the school is to carry out its tasks as a complement to the family.

Yet the only principle necessary may be the rebuilding of parental consensus through recreating social capital in the community served by the school. This social capital, once created, will support the school through the rules, norms, and standards which are part of this social capital. The creation of such social capital by the school consists, quite simply, of creating closure of the form shown in figure 5a. The relations between parents themselves, however they are brought into existence, will then operate on their own in the

ways described earlier to make and enforce norms that reinforce the school's goals.[7]

This social capital among parents, once created, will not always reinforce school goals, nor should it. A strong body of parents is a force in the community that will often act in accord with the school—but as an agent for the children of the community, it also acts as a check on the actions of the school.

How Can Social Capital in the Community Be Built?

Bringing about involvement of parents with one another is an unfamiliar task for most schools. It is a task without an extensive body of knowledge to guide it. Nevertheless, some principles are useful.

1. Antagonistic and unpleasant contacts between school and parents are the result of passivity on the part of the school. If the school waits for parents to initiate contact, the contact is likely to be about a problem, and potentially antagonistic.

2. Most parents are occupied with other matters, and will not become actively involved with other parents unless that activity satisfies a particular interest. Some points follow from this:

- Merely bringing parents together without a specific reason will ordinarily be ineffective.

---

[7] There is a second possible remedy for the problem of authority in the school, through a modern-day social contract. If a school system gives up its prerogative of assigning children to schools (through magnet schools or another system of choice), it gains an important asset: Since children and parents can now choose among schools, the schools may require students and parents to accept and obey a set of rules as a condition of entering and continuing in the school.

It is not, of course, merely the institution of choice that can bring about the consensus on which viable authority depends. Choice makes it possible for the principal to require more of parents and children, but the principal must grasp this possibility. This may be, as is done in some schools, through a written contract signed by parent and child, or it may be by verbal contract. The central point is, however, that once the school becomes a school of choice, a form of social contract between the school and its clients is possible that was not possible before.

- However, associations, relationships, and organizations fostered by the school can sometimes be built on existing common interests, such as having children in the same grade (for younger children) or in the same extracurricular activity (for older children) or with the same problem or handicap (for children of any age).

- A crisis or a common problem can often serve to pull parents from other activities to organize for action. Frequently cited examples are crises initiated by drug or alcohol use or by an automobile accident involving a high school driver.

3. Relationships among parents, and between parents and the school, established for one purpose persist over time, and can be social capital available for other purposes. This has been extensively documented in social research on communities. For example, Merton (1968) found that community organizations created in a housing development to fight unreliable contractors continued afterwards as a social resource available for other purposes.

4. Parents of teenagers and sub-teens have a strong interest in norms or standards of behavior and dress. However, they often lack the communication that gives knowledge about the standards on which a set of parents can agree. The school can in some cases overcome this lack through bringing parents together specifically on matters of dress, or rules about dating, parties, and nighttime hours. But these are only starting points; items listed in the Resources section show various ways in which schools can help create social capital in the community.

5. Certain barriers to parental involvement with schools can be overcome by modern technology. For example, a program called the Transparent School Model uses electronic mail and telephone answering machines to allow parents to leave messages for teachers, and teachers to transmit messages to parents via telephone lines (Baruch 1988). This program has been pilot tested in several schools in Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia. A similar program has been used in St. Paul, Minnesota. A similar but less ambitious arrangement is part of the "Parents in Touch" program of the Indianapolis Public School System. As fax machines and other technology come into use, additional alternatives become available. Technology, however, provides only the opportunity; an active interest on the school's part in increasing parental involvement is necessary if the opportunity is to be used.

How Can Social Capital in the Family Be Built?

A task quite unfamiliar to most school administrators is involving parents with their own children. School staff might say, and properly so, that such a task, at least in its full generality, is not the school's responsibility. Yet one area in which schools can act concerns homework. Schools demand homework, and assume that parents will reinforce the school's demands and provide a setting in which children can meet the demands. But to expect that parents know how to reinforce the school's demands, and know how to provide a setting conducive to the child's completing homework is a serious error. There are specific, concrete points that parents do not know. How long does the school expect an average child in a given grade to spend on homework? What time is best for doing homework? What kind of setting should the parents attempt to provide? What are the pros and cons of rewards contingent upon finishing homework? Should a specific period of time be set aside for homework or should the child be free as soon as the homework is finished? What rules are best about telephone calls during the homework period?

What is true of homework is true of other contexts of parental involvement with the child's schooling. The principal point is that parents are unskilled in helping their children to succeed in school. Even well-educated parents often lack the knowledge of what practices in the home will most help their children to succeed in school. The school, on its own or with the aid of specialized professionals, can help parents help their children.

Strategies for Parents

Other sections of this paper have examined parental involvement from the perspective of school administrators and teachers. A major aim of the paper is to show that a school's success with children is highly dependent on the strength of those children's families, and of the community, which taken together, they constitute. It thus becomes in the school's own interest to strengthen these social resources, the social capital available for the child's education. If school administrators and staff can come to recognize the importance

of this task to their overall goal, it will be a step in the direction of a mutual reinforcement of school and family activities.

But schools, principals, and teachers have interests of their own, interests that are not identical to the interests of parents nor to the interests of children. It is important for parents to recognize that, and to see the ways in which the interests of school staff can lead to actions against parental involvement.

Incorporating the interests and activities of parents into the functioning of a school can in the long run give the school greater strength for its task of educating children; but this is a more difficult task of school administration. It requires more consultation, building consensus over a wider range of people, sharing control, and sharing responsibility. To keep parents away from school functioning simplifies the administrative task.

These tendencies are natural ones on the part of school staff; in some schools, these tendencies are overcome, but in others there is active resistance to parent involvement. In such schools, it falls to parents to educate the educators, to lead them to see the long-run benefits of developing extensive involvement of parents with one another and with the school—or if the educators cannot see these benefits, to assert parents' rights to be involved with the education of their children.

Resources for Schools and Resources for Parents

A number of organizations, the school's PTA being the most prominent example, are designed to facilitate parents' involvement with their children's education and parental involvement with school and community. There are other organizations with different overall aims, but with departments focused on this aim. The American Federation of Teachers is an example. A few organizations of both types are listed below:

National Committee for Citizens in Education (NCCE)
10840 Little Patuxent Parkway, Suite 301
Columbia, MD 21044
(301) 997-9300

The Home and School Institute
1201 16th Street NW
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 466-3633

National Congress of Parents and Teachers
(The National PTA)
700 North Rush Street
Chicago, IL 60611
(312) 787-0977

Center for Restructuring
American Federation of Teachers
555 New Jersey Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 879-4559

TIPS (Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork)
Center for the Social Organization of Schools
Dr. Joyce Epstein
Johns Hopkins University
3401 North Charles Street
Baltimore, MD 21218
(301) 338-7570

Academic Development Institute
1307 South Wabash Street, Suite 205
Chicago, IL 60605
(312) 427-1692

Some of these organizations provide literature related to parental involvement. The TIPS program has a list of more than 40 reports and materials on parental involvement that can be obtained from the Center for a nominal fee; the list itself is free. NCCE publishes an annotated bibliography of materials on parent involvement (Henderson 1987). The National PTA maintains an extensive set of materials for use by parents and teachers. The Home and School Institute has several publications directly focused on parents' rights vis-a-vis schools and on parent involvement (Schimmel and Fischer 1987, Rich 1988). The Academic Development Institute has workbooks and course materials used in their Family Study Institute, which trains parents to aid their children in succeeding at school.

Bibliography

Baruch, J. P. 1988. "The Technology Connection for Better Parent Involvement." *Tennessee Educational Leadership* 15: 23–25.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1980. "Le Capital Social: Notes Provisaires." *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 3:2–3.

Coleman, James S. 1990. *Foundations of Social Theory.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Coleman, James S., Ernest Q. Campbell, Carol J. Hobson, Alexander M. Mood, James M. McPartland, Frederic D. Weinfeld, and Robert L. York. 1966. *Equality of Educational Opportunity.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Coleman, James S. and Thomas Hoffer. 1987. *Public and Private High Schools: The Impact of Communities.* New York: Basic Books.

Coleman, James S., Thomas Hoffer, and Sally Kilgore. 1982. *High School Achievement: Public, Catholic, and Private Schools Compared.* New York: Basic Books.

Epstein, Joyce L. 1986. "Parents' Reactions to Teacher Practices of Parent Involvement." *Elementary School Journal* (January): 276–94.

Epstein, Joyce L. 1987. "What Principals Should Know About Parent Involvement." *Principal* (January): 6–9.

Flap, H. D., and N. D. De Graaf. 1986. "Social Capital and Attained Occupational Status." *The Netherlands Journal of Sociology* 22: 145–61.

Henderson, Anne. 1987. *The Evidence Continues to Grow: Parent Involvement Improves Student Achievement.* Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens in Education.

Kellaghan, T. 1989. "The Home Environment and School Learning." Mimeograph. Dublin: St. Patrick's College.

Loury, G. 1977. "A Dynamic Theory of Racial Income Differences." Chap. 8 in *Women, Minorities, and Employment Discrimination.* Edited by P.A. Wallace and A. Le Mund. Lexington, MA.: Lexington Books.

Merton, Robert K. 1968. *Social Theory and Social Structure.* 3rd edition. New York: Free Press.

Milne, Ann, David Myers, Alvin Rosenthal, and Alan Ginsburg. 1986. "Single Parents, Working Mothers, and the Educational Achievement of School Children." *Sociology of Education* 59: 125–39.

Moles, Oliver C. 1982. "Synthesis of Recent Research on Parent Participation in Children's Education." *Educational Leadership* (November) 44–47.

Rich, Dorothy. 1988. *MegaSkills: How Families Can Help Children Succeed in School and Beyond.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Schimmel, David, and Louis Fischer. 1987. *Parents, Schools, and the Law.* Columbia, MD: The National Committee for Citizens in Education.

U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census (1975). *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census (1947, 1949, 1951, 1984). *Statistical Abstract of the United States.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census (1985). *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1986.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ED/OERI91-18

* U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1991 - 281-692 - 814/43410